

COVID-19 Protocol for Seekonk Annual Town Meeting 2021

*Note: Subject to Amendment; Check for updates at www.seekonk-ma.gov
May 22, 2021*

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Seekonk Annual Town Meeting will look and feel different. Town Meeting will now take place outdoors on Connolly Field on Saturday, May 22, 2021 at 10:00AM (rain date: Sunday, May 23, 2021 at 12:00 PM). The Moderator has developed this protocol for the Town Meeting, in consultation with the Select Board and Seekonk's Health Agent, to provide as nearly as possible the participatory experience to which Seekonk voters are accustomed, while simultaneously protecting public health. This protocol is published in advance of Town Meeting to provide expectations to all voters. However, changes in this protocol may be required prior to Annual Town Meeting. Please check the Town's website www.seekonk-ma.gov regularly for changes to protocol and other information on 2021 Annual Town Meeting.

Risk Assessment

COVID-19 continues to pose a risk to the Seekonk community. Governor Baker's orders regarding social distancing and the Seekonk Board of Health's order requiring social distancing remains in effect. The public health ramifications of COVID-19 are evolving and being closely watched by the Moderator, Select Board, and Seekonk's Public Health and Safety Officials for impact on plans for Annual Town Meeting.

Venue

In view of the consensus among public health experts that COVID-19 transmission risk is substantially less outdoors than indoors, Annual Town Meeting will be held outdoors, on the Connolly Field located at the Seekonk High School. The Meeting is scheduled to begin during daylight hours, to maximize safety of attendees in walking about outdoors, and timed to minimize heat and maximize likelihood of completing the Meeting in one session. The Connolly Field will best serve the logistical needs of the Meeting for parking, physically/socially distant seating, accessibility, restrooms, ingress/egress, and utility support. There will be a small "pop-up" tented area for "rest", but seating will otherwise be uncovered. Hand held umbrellas, hats, sunscreen, insect repellent, and water are recommended. To ensure that all votes are counted and that visibility is not impeded, "pop-up" tents and beach style umbrellas are prohibited.

Requirements of Voters

Voters will be required to observe a 6-foot physical distance at all times from persons not part of their own households, and to refrain from attending the Meeting if they have a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19, or have had a known exposure within the preceding two weeks to a person infected with COVID-19. **Voters should plan to arrive early. Check in will begin 1 hour prior to the start of Town Meeting and it is recommended to arrive at least 45 minutes prior to the start of the meeting.**

Public Health Precautions

Town staff will guide the movement of voters to maintain appropriate social distance. Physical/social distancing will be maintained in restrooms by limiting occupancy.

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Check-in Procedure

Voter check-in location, and appropriate physical/social distance markers while queueing, will be identifiable by clear signage, and staff will guide voters. Staff will provide voters with meeting materials prior to check in. **Please ensure that you secure meeting materials before locating a seat.**

Seating Arrangements

Folding chairs will be pre-positioned on the field at a minimum of 6-feet apart; members of the same household may sit together.

Meeting Materials (Warrant)

Daylight, distance, and WiFi/power logistics will prevent us from having video presentation screens. Instead, a summary of information on articles will be printed with the Meeting materials and distributed to voters. Voters will be asked to consult their materials. Additional information will be posted on the town website www.seekonk-ma.gov in advance of the Meeting. There will be no “handouts” distributed at the Meeting other than the Meeting materials provided at check-in.

No Visual Presentations on Articles

In the interests of shortening the Meeting and reducing the risk to public health, there will be no visual presentations on articles at this year’s Annual Town Meeting. As we reach each article, the Moderator will refer voters to the motion under the article included in the Meeting Materials, and open the floor for questions and comments. A summary on pertinent articles, written by its sponsor, will be included in the Meeting Materials. **In preparation to attend Annual Town Meeting, voters are urged to watch the videos and presentations on the articles which will be available on the town website, www.seekonk-ma.gov, under the Town Moderator tab.**

Speaking from the Floor

Microphones will be available for voters to speak from the floor. In light of the public health threat posed by the pandemic and the accordant advisability of limiting the length of the Meeting, speaking time from the floor will be limited to two minutes per person and strictly enforced. There will be two stationary microphones located closer to the stage area and wireless microphones may be used, as deemed necessary by the Moderator.

Voting

Voting will be by raising the color paper voting slip provided at check-in. If voters are holding up umbrellas for shade, the Moderator may ask for umbrellas to be lowered during the vote. The Moderator expects that Tellers will be present to take a standing vote count in the event that the Moderator cannot visually call the vote. In the event that the Meeting votes to take a vote by secret ballot, the procedure for taking the vote will be announced by the Moderator at the Meeting.

Organization of Boards and Committees

The Select Board and the Finance Committee will be seated together at an appropriate physical distance in designated areas.

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Childcare

There will be no childcare services available the day of the meeting.

Restrooms

The Connolly Field is serviced by a restroom building and additional portable restrooms will be available for the Meeting. Voters will be asked to queue outside the restrooms at an appropriate physical/social distance and to limit occupancy of the restroom to a posted maximum number of persons. Voters are reminded to use hand sanitizer or sanitizing wipes, which will be provided.

Water

All voters should bring their own water. There will be no ability at the Meeting to refill water bottles.

Medical Emergencies

There will be a tent without sides located near the entrance of the field and staffed by medical personnel. A rescue vehicle will also be on site for any emergencies.

Parking

Parking will be available at the High School and along Ledge Road. Police details will be provided to assist with the flow of traffic and accommodate overflow parking. Voters should allow extra time to park and for the walk from parking to the fields. There will be available handicap parking near the entrance of the field (spots are limited). Individuals may also drop others close to the entrance of the field to limit walking distances.

Weather/Public Health or Safety Contingency Plans

Rain, wind, heat, or a public health or safety threat could require postponement of the Meeting from May 22. The “rain date” for the Meeting is Sunday, May 23 at 12:00PM. The Moderator would make any postponement determination in consultation with the Select Board and town public health and safety officials. Notice of postponement to voters will be made by posting on the town website, www.seekonk-ma.gov under News & Announcements to subscribers, automated phone call, email, and text messaging to CodeRed subscribers, and announcements on the Town’s Facebook page.